St. Thomas 6th January 1880

My dear Professor Gray!

I am in receipt of your letter of 7th ult. and beg to thank you for it as well as for your final trouble with the corrections and titlepage of my treatise, which I now hope has passed through all the preliminaries for its appearance in print. It is at all events some months ago already, since I saw it in the list of publications of the Smithsonian Institution, July 1879, and I hope therefore soon to receive the copies from Washington.

It is very interesting indeed to see how the Westindies again come in for a share of consideration with regard to botanical geography. I very well understand that many people prefer rushing about into new and hardly known regions of the world in order to bring to light new and no doubt very interesting species of plants. But they will seldom succeed in doing more than adding merely to the number of known species and perhaps show us some new forms. But the grander and more subtle problems of the relations between the various elements of a flora or the conditions under which it has probably been developed and migrated cannot be found out or solved by a few months stay in a country and must necessarily remain postponed for further and more delicate inquiry. Very little as yet has been done

Hayti, who calls himself a professor of botany or some such thing, in order to induce him to collect plants there and join me in this work, but never heard from him. It is very difficult under these latitudes to make people take an interest in anything above their daily drudgery.

Your last passages in your letter hold out the possibility that you might one day visit these islands. I need hardly say, my dear Professor, how glad that would make me to see you here and how happy I should be to offer you my house to stay in whilst you were here in St. Thomas. With the steamers running down here in 5 days from New York, the trip would after all not be so very lengthy, in less than two months you could see most of the W. Indies by taking a so called intercolonial steamer that runs pleasantly down all the principal islands as far as Trinidad and back again in time to return on the 21st of the month. I trust you will reconsider this plan and try to make it possible for you to leave your work for a short trip in these sunny climes, which no doubt for you especially would be of the highest interest and I am sure of use to science no less.

Sending you finally my best wishes for a happy new year

I remain faithfully

Yours

Eggers

comparatively in this respect in more temperate countries, hardly anything in the tropics.

As I have already ventured before to give you, dear Professor, my opinion on the importance as for tropical climates of this archipelago in this respect, I shall not enter again on this subject. I only beg your permission to cite a few words from the "Bulletin de la Société botanique de France," I believe Vol. 26, which I have not seen myself, but which a friend of mine in Copenhagen, Dr. Warming, has called my attention to, showing the opinion of a french botanist with regard to the importance of thorough botanical studies even in these lesser islands. Speaking of a treatise of mine on the Flora of St. Croix, published in the Copenhagen Videnskab. Medd. fra Naturhist. Forening 1876, he says: "L'essai de M. le baron Eggers comble donc une lacune et fournira une base nouvelle, je ne dirai pas précisement de la flore, mais bien de la géographie botanique des Antilles." And further down: "On lira avec interêt le parallèle établi par l'auteur entre la végétation de Sainte Croix et celle de Saint Thomas, parallèle dont nous regrettons de ne pouvoir, faute de place, reproduire ici les détails.

In the treatise alluded to I have barely touched upon the question of the differences in the floras of the various islands as it merely treats of Saint Croix alone.

Now, of course I shall always consider an exact knowledge of the species in a flora the fundamental thing when treating of the botany of a country. But then, on the other hand, I only consider this the necessary preliminary step to arrive at further conclusions, and as long as we do not possess a more exact knowledge of the W.I. island than that afforded by Grisebachs Flora and other works, we are not warranted to go beyond our present limits in this interesting question about the emigration of species or probable centres of creation.

Now, what I should wish to urge is this, that the next step and the one, that with the least expense and trouble would bring us the furthest, would be to have the island of Portorico with Crab Island and Culebra explored as well as possible.

When I saw you had nearly succeeded in ~~pers~~ obtaining the valuable services of Mr. Wright, I did indeed congratulate botany on this prospect, as hardly any person could be more fit for the work than he. People acquainted with W.I. floras seem to be extremely scarce, in Europe I know of none, Grisebach had all his knowledge from dried specimens, although he was an expert. Fortunately Portorico is a very good field for one to commence the work, as it is easily accessible everywhere, very healthy, near to main steamer routes and in perfect order and tranquillity. So I still hope you may be able to find some person that will undertake this most interesting work, I am sorry, circumstances do not allow me to do it myself, otherwise I need hardly say, I should be only too glad to continue my studies further in that direction.

In order to further my grand plan of compiling a W.I. flora without regard to political division, which in my opinion is the worst possible distinction where science is concerned, I wrote to a Mr. Dehoux in